

# RALPH MUNRO



# DISABILITY RIGHTS PIONEER

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**T**he Summer of Love's soundtrack by The Doors and Sgt. Pepper was still wafting around VW vans. The first issue of *Rolling Stone* magazine was about to hit the streets. And Baby Boomers were weighing the dare posed by Jimi Hendrix's debut album: "Are you experienced?" It was September of 1967.

Instead of following psychedelic guru Timothy Leary's advice to "turn on, tune in and drop out," 24-year old Ralph Munro was writing letters from his Seattle apartment. He had a new "special friend," Terry, a 7-year old who lived at the Fircrest School in Shoreline.

"I work with him, buy him clothes, teach him as much as possible and try to provide some of the extras that institutionalized children don't receive," Munro says in a letter seeking donations for an upcoming Christmas party for people with disabilities, or, as they were then called, "the handicapped."

A big man who exudes warm confidence, Munro remains best known for his five terms as Washington's secretary of state, his campaign to stop transforming killer whales into circus animals and his fondness for kilts and bagpipes. Not so many realize he was also a pioneering figure in the state's disability rights movement. Through two bits of serendipity on one 1968 day, Munro would come to work for Governor Dan Evans. And he would use every opportunity after that to get Terry in front of the governor, so he'd have a poignant reminder of the plight of thousands of children in the state.

IN HIS YOUTH, Munro was not exactly a choir boy. Yes, he was student body president at Bainbridge High School and Western Washington State College where "everybody was his friend." But he had a mischievous streak that got him sent home from college his freshman year. And after returning and graduating, he still wasn't on a clear career path. He worked in food service, at the state Legislature, and for Boeing. He tried to enlist in the Army but was rejected.



Ever the Scotsman, Munro dons a kilt any chance he gets; here with his son, George, in 1986. *Washington State Archives*



Munro had been rejected by the Army and was looking for a way to serve his community when he met and befriended Terry Sullivan in 1966. *Sullivan collection*

His concern for disabled children was kindled a few days before Christmas 1966. Munro got a frantic call from his landlord, who helped organize annual Holiday Cruises for the Handicapped on Puget Sound aboard the steamboat *Virginia V*. The guy scheduled to cook hot dogs on that night's cruise didn't show. Munro's landlord asked if he could help. "Sure," Munro said. Aboard the historic steamer, packed with more than 100 adults and children, food was served, carols sung and pictures snapped with Santa. Munro spotted Terry Sullivan sitting alone in a corner of the boisterous party. Abandoned by his mother, the developmentally disabled boy didn't talk. Afraid of men, he was very hesitant when Munro approached him. After that night, Munro felt a bit discouraged. "I went home that night and frankly, I cried," he said in a 1971 interview with public television. "I was ashamed of myself for not knowing more about retardation and individual problems the mentally retarded face. Inside

I was just angry that more wasn't being done."

On Christmas morning, Munro decided to bring Terry a few presents and scope out Fircrest. "I was determined I would at least try to be his friend." Munro was chagrined he wasn't serving his country like his buddies in Vietnam. Eager to enlist, he had gone to the Army induction center in Seattle one morning. But he was rejected, classified 4F because of a heart murmur and pectus excavatum, or a sunken chest. "I felt terrible about it," Munro says. "I was working at Boeing during the day and thought, 'Yeah, I'll start going out and working with these kids.' And I really liked it." So began decades of friendship between Terry and Ralph.

"Ralph led me through some remarkable years in advancements for the developmentally disabled in this state," Dan Evans said when Munro retired after 20 years as secretary of state. "Ralph was the one who taught me how to care."

Munro sidesteps the praise from the three-term Republican governor. "He cared before me. But it was interesting that Terry became a change agent in many ways. Every piece of legislation that was proposed, that related to handicapped people, the governor would ask, 'How does this relate to Terry?' He was thinking, 'How does this affect an individual kid?' "

Disabled people were still shunned by society in the 1960s and stuck in state institutions. But progress came as advocates, including Munro, positioned themselves under the umbrella of the civil rights movement. Munro had a hand in the state's revolutionary Edu-



"Ralph was the one who taught me how to care," says former Gov. Dan Evans, here playing with Darwin Neely, a developmentally disabled boy. *Washington State Archives*

cation for All law; it gave *all* children a right to public schooling, which allowed many parents to keep their kids home instead of confining them in institutions. He got Evans to spend part of a day in a wheelchair in a crusade for the state's first accessibility requirements. He helped expand state law to protect those with "sensory, mental and physical" disabilities from discrimination. He co-authored and led the campaign for Referendum 37, steering \$25 million in state bonds to building group homes and job training facilities around the state. As the state's top elections official, Munro even published the first Braille voters' pamphlet in the state.

Seven former and future governors, from Al Rosellini to Chris Gregoire, chortled through Munro's December 2000 retirement gala.

They roasted his globetrotting. They needled his work ethic. During a spoof of Hollywood Squares, they were asked, "What does Ralph wear under that kilt?" Near the end of the bash, a somber Munro thanked Terry for his friendship and asked him up to the dais. Then 40, working and living independently, looking sharp in a suit and tie, Terry stopped to shake Evans' hand. Then he and Munro clasped hands while the esteemed audience gave them a long loud ovation.

MUNRO'S COLLEGE YEARS sound more like outtakes from *Animal House* than *The Miracle Worker*. After a day of grueling exams his freshman year, Munro and friends drank a lot of beer. For five hours. "We were very drunk," Munro recalled in an oral history for Western Washington University. They wanted to crash a school dance and Munro, tall and skinny, took a flight of stairs in one leap. Unfortunately, the Dean of Student Activities was standing at the bottom. "I hit him pretty square and he went down. That was pretty much the end of my college career for that year," Munro said. The Dean of Men called him into his office. "We aren't going to formally boot you out. But you're out," he told Munro. "You're going to go home for a quarter and see if you can grow up a bit." When fall came around, Munro was on "disciplinary and social probation," ergo no student activities or





Fun-loving Munro was known for his pranks, but even then the student body president stood out as a leader. *Washington State Archives*

athletic events and lots of studying.

On Columbus Day 1962, his mother, a teacher, had a heart attack in her classroom and died the next day. Munro, his two brothers and his father, an electrician at the Bremerton Naval Shipyard, were devastated. "I returned to Western a pretty lonely kid," Munro said. He kept his grades above the required 2.5 GPA and became more involved in campus activities and politics, including Young Republicans, mainly because his family had been Republicans.

"We probably drank too much beer, probably had too much fun. But we did go to class and we did do political science stuff," said Dean Foster, who was active in the campus chapter of Young Democrats and was elected student body vice-president as part of a coalition with Munro atop the ticket. They became good friends, often stopping to chat in the halls of the Capitol when Foster was chief of staff for Governor Booth Gardner.

Protests against the Vietnam War were just picking up momentum when Foster and Munro were upperclassmen at Western. Campus politics focused more on the civil rights struggles of blacks in the south. Foster's most keen memory of Munro was when the student body president defended the right of the American Nazi Party leader, George Lincoln Rockwell, to speak at Western. "The local American Legion and I believe Republicans and a local radio station went crazy," Foster says. "And Ralph spent a lot of time working with them, saying, 'This is OK. We students are adults. We can hear this.' And he helped calm that down." Rockwell was an "absolute wacko," Munro said, but free speech

is a core value of democracy.

The pranks didn't come to a complete halt. A fan of Johnny Cash, Munro and his roommate one night wired their dormitory intercom so it piped loud country-western music into every room while they slipped off to Canada. He and a roommate stole a Bellingham department store Christmas tree early one morning while a pal distracted store decorators by banging trash can lids in the alley out back. Another doozy sprang from the shocking realization that Bellingham then legally dumped its garbage directly into the bay. Munro and a couple friends borrowed an old black car. Munro wore a hard hat. A friend dressed in a suit. They drove to where a bulldozer was pushing heaps of trash into the water. They pretended to be environmental officials. "This is grossly illegal. This dump is closed," Munro told a grizzled older man pushing bulldozer loads. The bulldozer operator stepped down, eyed the "officials" suspiciously, and said, "Fine by me." Munro and friends drove away. They later heard their ruse sent ripples through City Hall.

An education major, Munro planned to do his student teaching at Bellingham High. But first there were debates about his complexion. "I had, all through college, a terrible complexion. The worst complexion of anybody I ever saw," he says. "They were very worried that the students would tease me and I wouldn't do well student-teaching. But I'd had that complexion for a long time and I just didn't let it bother me." Walking down the hall on his very first morning teaching at Bellingham High, a big football player looked at Munro and raised his middle finger. What was the aspiring teacher to do? "I went over and grabbed him by the back of his shirt and hauled him down to the principal's office and threw him in a chair and said, 'This young man was making inappropriate gestures in the hallway.' That was the last of my problems at Bellingham High School."

With a newly-minted degree in education, Munro could make \$5,000 a year teaching or \$7,000 a year working at Boeing, which was then "hiring any warm-bodied individual that had a college degree." He opted for the latter and spent the next couple years bouncing between Boeing, the food business, and jobs in the state Legislature when it was in session. He rarely went a few days without visiting Terry. "I'd say to my buddies, 'You guys all go to the tavern looking for cute women. All the cute young women are working at Fircrest.' "

He took Terry for a car ride one day and as they cruised down 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue Northeast a Fircrest bus went by. Terry looked up and said, "Bus ride." Two syllables. Munro was amazed. The kid could talk. A



When they first met Terry didn't speak, but with Munro's help he soon said dozens of words. *Sullivan collection*

few days later Terry said “church” after seeing a steeple in the University District. Soon after, Munro saw a Fircrest speech therapist struggling to get Terry to name animals in a book. Munro asked the teacher how he might help. “What he needs is someone to take him to the zoo and show him these animals, but I just don’t have time,” the therapist said. Living just blocks from the Woodland Park Zoo, Munro jumped at the opportunity. He felt like an extension of Terry’s professional teacher. He began to fathom all that volunteers could do. They could provide transportation, help with recreation, assist with meals, build community support and provide love. Terry seemed to like having a friend, someone to hold his hand and hug him now and then. That didn’t take any special skills or degrees. Munro was hooked.

Unlike many volunteers and advocates, Munro didn’t have a personal connection to the developmentally disabled, other than knowing the daughter of a summer neighbor, John Hauberg. He did, though, help his mother collect donations on Bainbridge Island for the March of Dimes and Children’s Hospital. “It became family custom. We weren’t wealthy. We didn’t have money,” he said of growing up on Bainbridge Island. “But we donated time.”

Then a bolt of fortune—actually two bolts on the same day—put Munro on a path to bigger things. It started on the afternoon of March 21, 1968, memorialized in Governor Evans’ calendar with the note “Fircrest 3 pm.” Evans went out to Shoreline to dedicate a new building at the institution. As a temporary supply clerk in the Legislature, Munro had more than once set up a microphone and speaker for Evans in the rotunda outside the governor’s office. “So he kind of knew who I was,” Munro says. Now on more familiar turf, Munro walked over to Evans after the ceremony, explained that he was a volunteer and introduced Terry, whose vocabulary had grown to more than 50 words. Evans was fascinated. Munro asked if the governor wanted to see the “backside of Fircrest.” Evans nodded. Munro took him to one of the old World War II barracks that housed 60 adults, with just one attendant working overnight. The staff may have been dedicated, but they were too few. “It was just warehousing,” Munro says. As interested as Evans seemed, Munro thought, “We’ll never see him again.”

A few hours later, Munro was working a catering job at Seattle Center. It was a banquet for an organization, Job Therapy, whose volunteers helped state prisoners prepare for their release. He didn’t even know Evans was speaking that night. Munro was scraping food off dishes when Betty, the lead waitress, came back, grabbed him and said, “I think the governor is talking about you.”

What? Munro stuck his head into the Rainier Room. Evans was winding up his talk about volunteerism and his visit to Fircrest where he met a young boy who had learned how to talk. Munro later followed the governor out to his car. Still wearing his slop-covered apron, he thanked Evans. “You call my office,” the governor said. “I want to talk to you.”

Munro scheduled an appointment in Olympia. He spent about five minutes with Evans. “I want you to write a report for me,” Evans told him. “Nothing big, nothing long,

just what we need to do to get more volunteers.”

The next month, April 1968, Evans told reporters he wanted to encourage an army of citizen volunteers, especially in endeavors requiring compassion and understanding, such as helping with prisoner rehabilitation, aiding retarded youngsters and tutoring underprivileged children. “It’s a known fact that a high percentage of retarded youngsters in our institutions, if they are given sufficient training and help, can improve enough to return to a home environment. But it takes volunteers such as I met recently met at Fircrest School...”

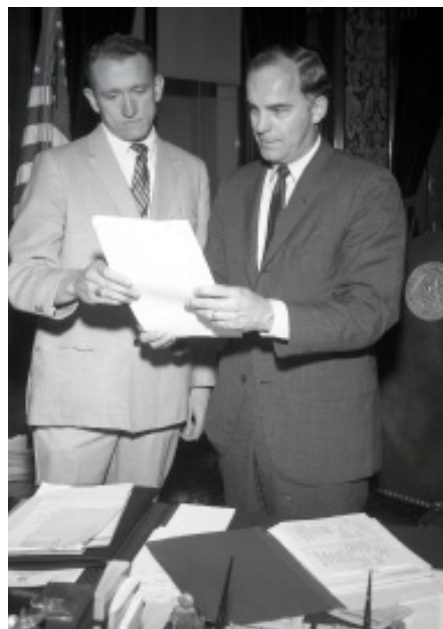
Munro became a recurring figure in commencement speeches Evans gave in the following months at St. Martin’s College, Eastern Washington State College and the University of Washington. “Show me the critics, the protesters, the youth who believe there is no hope to be found and no service to render—and I will show them where they can make a difference...I will show them one single individual man who devotes every spare hour from his job and his family in helping mentally retarded children to find and grasp the joys of life.”

In June, Evans appointed a committee to study volunteerism. Not yet 25, Munro was named to lead the group. Their first meeting was “like sitting on a high voltage power line,” Munro recalled. Their three-page report called for creating an office of volunteers under the governor, providing insurance for volunteers, and most importantly, recommending that professional staff use volunteers.

The next year, Evans made Munro the state’s first volunteer coordinator. “My job was to go out and convince agency directors that they needed volunteers involved,” he says. “You would think unions would go crazy. But I’d sit with union leaders and say, ‘Look, this is not to replace anybody. What we want to do is have you use volunteers.’”

Munro produced a brochure that Evans liked to tout. Over pictures of campus demonstrations, its front cover said only, “Where the Hell Were You Last Spring?” Inside, it said, “Well, Here Is Where You Should Have Been.” It listed various community needs such as student tutoring. “It was somewhat controversial,” Munro says, “but Dan personally OK’d it.”

Young Munro began to grasp his privileged position. “I realized—and it’s so hard to believe when you’re that age—I was somebody the governor listened to. I realized that



After two chance meetings in one day in 1968, Munro would become coordinator of volunteer services for Gov. Dan Evans.  
*Washington State Archives*



what I told the governor better be important. It better be the real stuff.”

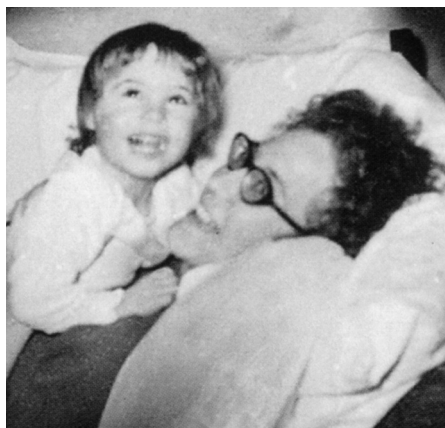
His flash of insight soon met with a new branch of the civil rights movement.

IN THE 1960s PEOPLE with disabilities still did not have access to public transportation, telephones, bathrooms and stores. Parents of children with intellectual or developmental disabilities had only two options unless they were quite wealthy. They could keep a child at home and spend their days trying to help that child, who was often unwelcome at churches, restaurants, even family gatherings. Or, they could confine their children to a state institution, often far from home, where poor conditions and abuse were not uncommon – and parental guilt was a by-product.

Doctors did not always appear sympathetic. Katie Dolan, a Seattleite instrumental in changing Washington law, was told she was to blame for her son Patrick’s autism. (Conventional medicine then held that autism was caused by a mother’s emotional detachment.) Janet Taggart, another Seattle mother at the vanguard of activism, read in one book that children with “mental retardation”—her daughter Naida had cerebral palsy but was initially diagnosed as retarded – should be dressed in drab clothing because bright colors would only draw attention to them. “It was a very dark time in our country’s history,” says Sue Elliott, executive director of The Arc of Washington State, a group that has advocated for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities for more than 80 years.

If parents were lucky enough to find a receptive school or treatment program they could afford, their children were often kicked out because of their unpredictable behavior. A group of Seattle moms helped build an alternative school system in the late 1960s, first run out of church basements, then the non-profit, Northwest Center, dedicated to educating kids rejected by schools. Dolan came to realize her deep-seated grief was rooted in her inability to embrace her son’s diagnosis 15 years earlier. “It was his life that I have never accepted. I finally saw him as Patrick Dolan and not as the person I wanted him to be—to dress up in clothes and behave in certain ways. I was always trying to find a doctor or school or a way to cure him.” Then she met Taggart and other moms with a similar mindset. They were a new breed of activist. They didn’t want to make changes in their kids, but in the system itself.

So where to start?



Children with disabilities were still shunned by society in the 1960s, leaving many parents to provide care at home. Janet Taggart (above) felt so isolated with her daughter, Naida, she took out an ad looking for mothers like her. *Becoming Citizens, Family Life and the Politics of Disability*.



Washington's revolutionary "Education for All" law was largely the work of four women and two law students. Left, Janet Taggart, Katie Dolan, Cecile Lindquist, Gov. Evans, Evelyn Chapman, George Breck and Bill Dussault (inset). Munro gave them the idea that *all* children should have a right to attend their local public schools. *Becoming Citizens, Family Life and the Politics of Disability*.

Four of the Northwest Center founders—Dolan, Taggart, Evelyn Chapman and Cecile Lindquist—were chatting in 1969 with Munro. He suggested something as bold as the women: "Why don't you write a mandatory law that children with disabilities will be served by public schools?"

The ignorance reflected in state law was shocking. Some policies had been influenced by the Eugenics movement in the 1920s and had never been updated. State education code said that children who were afflicted with "loathsome and contagious diseases" including epilepsy and cerebral palsy were not allowed to be served by public schools. Some 33,000 children with disabilities in Washington were not enrolled in schools, a state study found.

"They always said our children are uneducable, therefore they didn't qualify for education rights," Dolan said. The women named their committee Education for All.

Soon, University of Washington Law School students George Breck and Bill Dussault were on board and researching. Dussault focused on the idea that education and civil rights were entwined, by Washington's state constitution, by the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, and by court rulings in cases such as U.S. Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education*. They drafted 29 versions of the Education for All bill before they had H.B. 90, "An Act relating to educational opportunities for all handicapped children."

They didn't have professional lobbyists, or help from the education establishment. What's more, their radical idea was that we must have a broader view of education. It should be more than the usual academic programs, Cecile Lindquist said. It should include whatever could be done to enhance a child's potential. The team kept a constant presence at the Capitol. They created dossiers on every lawmaker. They knew who had a child or relative with a disability, whose wife was a social worker or teacher, who kept a Bible on their desk.

They traveled statewide to secure sponsors and support. They also had an ally in Lindquist's cousin, Governor Evans. "I bet there were 15 to 20 experts who came into the governor's office and said, 'these people aren't educable,'" Munro recalls. "The governor's response was, 'Everyone is educable.' Maybe you're not going to teach them how to do mathematics or teach them how to do science projects. But they're going to learn basic skills."

The citizen activists were told it would take several years and cost at least \$50,000 to get such a law passed. It took them one year and less than \$500.

The team was later invited to Washington, D.C., to meet with powerful U.S. Senator Warren Magnuson. Each of the women spoke about the importance of the whole nation following Washington state's lead. An awkward moment of silence ensued until Magnuson looked at one of his aides and roared, "How come nobody ever told me this?"

Magnuson vowed to change the law. In 1975 the federal Education for All Handicapped Children Act passed.

"It was a group of four middle-aged women and one young attorney, along with Ralph, who created a huge, huge change in the way children and others with disabilities were served," says Sue Elliott.

Munro downplays his role. Evans credited the families who had taken up the cause. "It didn't take huge amounts of money. It didn't take paid lobbyists. It took citizens who cared."

**MUNRO'S NEXT PROPOSITION:** What if the governor spent a day in a wheelchair to demonstrate the architectural barriers faced by people with physical disabilities?

According to Jim Dolliver, who was then Evans' chief of staff, Munro's pitch to the governor went, "You're going to have to sit in a wheelchair all day long to see what it's like and to see why we need to have these things like cuts in the sidewalk and other helps for persons who are handicapped."

Some complained that the idea was demeaning. One state agency director told the governor, "My wife's in a wheelchair, it's very degrading." The point was just the opposite, Munro replied. It was to create access and a semblance of equal rights.

On the morning of Oct. 4, 1972, Evans edged his wheelchair out of the governor's mansion. "He eased his way down the serpentine mansion driveway, over curbs,



Munro got Gov. Evans to spend a day in a wheelchair to better understand the lack of public accessibility. Joining Evans were his sons, Ken Scheelhouse, an advocate for the disabled, and the press. *Washington State Archives*

around construction sites and up the small wooden ramps at the back door of the Capitol,” according to the Associated Press.

Skinned knuckles would be nothing unusual that day, David Ammons of the AP wrote, with the governor colliding “occasionally with walls and other objects.” Getting in and out of a car was one of his biggest challenges. “A sobering experience,” Evans called the six hours he spent in the chair. “That six-inch curb looked about as impossible as a six-foot wall.”

Munro, then a 29-year-old special assistant to Evans, had two ideas he wanted to push into law. “Before every legislative session the governor would

take us all to lunch,” Munro says, “and ask us to explain what we saw as priorities. For me, things like discrimination in the workplace and wheelchair access were top of the list.”

Senate Bill 2039 called for the construction of new public curbs to have at least two ramps, or cuts, per block that were wide enough and properly sloped to accommodate wheelchairs. The cities of Bellevue and Seattle had already started providing such access and sent Munro letters saying the costs were negligible.

That summer, Paul Dziedzic was a recent college graduate home in Lacey, looking to do some volunteer work for the state. A friend of his father, who knew Munro as a fellow bagpiper, told Dziedzic, “Why don’t you talk to Ralph?”

Munro took Dziedzic into the governor’s office and explained that a woman in Olympia had called him, complaining that the state Capitol campus was not accessible to her wheelchair. She wanted to know what the governor was going to do about it.

Dziedzic spent most of the next month pushing the woman, Lois Meyer, around the campus. “Literally to every building and floor, with me pushing and Lois taking extensive notes on her lap,” Dziedzic says. “It was an obstacle course that most of the time you couldn’t navigate.” (The Legislative and General Administration buildings, for instance, each had a single accessible entry if you happened to know where they were located.) Meyer and Dziedzic wrote a report that detailed the need for change.

The curb-cut, or wheelchair access bill passed in 1973. Then it was on to House Bill 445, which aimed to amend the state’s anti-discrimination law so that people couldn’t be denied jobs because of “sensory, mental and physical” handicaps.

It ran into opposition from the powerful Association of Washington Business, which claimed the bill would require employers to hire the handicapped. "NOWAY," Munro wrote in a memo. "No business would have to hire anyone who isn't equally capable." The bill was backed by veterans' organizations, the AFL-CIO and groups advocating for people with disabilities. Still, in the spring it was stuck in the Senate Rules Committee, where many bills went to quietly die without the witnesses or evidence of a floor vote.

"We desperately need help with this bill," Munro wrote in a memo to senators. "This is the most important handicapped bill of the session. It has passed the House 92-4 and Senate Rules is the last roadblock. Will you help?"

Munro took the unprecedented step of bringing a handful of people in wheelchairs into the Rules room to lend some leverage. "No one was quite sure what to do. They didn't want to throw us out and didn't know what to say," Munro recalls. State Senator Harry Lewis of Yelm barged into Evans' office. "Munro has wheelchairs in the rules room," he complained. "Well, I think they're citizens, Harry," Evans replied.

John Cherberg, the Democratic lieutenant governor, lobbied to get the bill through the Rules Committee. "John had been a football coach. He had been around kids. He knew handicapped people," Munro says. Evans signed the bill into law in May 1973.

Next up: giving people with disabilities a voice in the Governor's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped. The federally-funded group "really weren't doing much," Munro says, besides sponsoring a "Miss Wheelchair" contest. Evans named Meyer to chair the committee with Dziedzic as its executive director.

The group swelled to 100 members, with more than half of those being people with disabilities or their family members. Advocacy groups had tended to segregate by type of disability. Blind people had different priorities than people who used wheelchairs, and so on. These differences diluted their power and increased the sway of establishment advisers and bureaucrats. But the civil rights concept united people and the expanded committee "became a cross-disability voice in state government," Dziedzic says. "The disability community got inside state government."

Dziedzic went on to serve three more governors, including a stint as the director of the Washington Department of Services for the Blind. And then he continued to work in the field of vocational rehabilitation. An aspiring journalist when he met Munro, Dziedzic says he was "pretty much a blank slate" on disabilities. "People I got to know with disabilities, including Lois, had their lives together," he says. They didn't want sympathy. They wanted a voice, a place at the table. "I had a front row seat to watching that given birth," he says. "I got to be part of the civil rights movement. Ralph cut the pathway."

"He saw this as a civil rights issue, not as poor people who needed pity. He saw them as people whose rights were being abridged," says Norm Davis, Fircrest superintendent for 10 years.

It was no fluke that Dziedzic's work began with Munro taking a call from Lois



Meyer. "He was wide open for those stories," Dziedzic says, whether it was wheelchair access or witnessing whales, during a Sunday sail with friends, gruesomely captured in Puget Sound. (Munro fought to end the practice and had an orca, otherwise known as J-6, named after him in tribute.)

MUNRO'S WORK WAS ROOTED in relationships. He seemed drawn to those who needed help most. "He really likes to support people who he thinks are underrepresented, the invisible population, people who were discounted," says Davis, who was also director of the state's Division of Developmental Disabilities.

Along the way, Munro's influence helped Terry become one of the first children in the state to move from an institution to a foster home. And he helped persuade Evans to spend more state money on group homes.



"Terry became a change agent in many ways, Munro says. "Every piece of legislation that was proposed...the governor would ask, 'How does this relate to Terry?' " *Sullivan collection*

One night, after Munro had brought Terry to the governor's Christmas party for staff and family, he returned home to find his phone ringing at 9 p.m. He picked it up. "What in the hell, you, dammit," fumed Wally Miller, the budget director. "He was like Donald Trump," Munro says. "He'd rant and rave and get all ticked off." His beef this time? "Well, the governor saw some kid you brought in the mansion and now he wants \$15 million for handicapped education and I don't have the money and you sonuvabitch, you screwed up the whole budget!" Miller didn't have anything against disabled people, Munro says. But it was late December and he had the state budget wrapped up and buttoned down.

Now he had to take it apart and remake it. "Terry did have an impact," Munro says.

Jim Dolliver, the Evans' aide who would become chief justice of the state Supreme Court, said, "The fact that in this community we have cuts in the sidewalk at the corners so a wheelchair can get up and down from the street is nothing more than the extended shadow of Ralph Munro. He is the one who pushed this, and all he had done for the handicapped persons will never be known."

EVANS HAD FINISHED his third term as governor by January 1977 and newly elected Dixy Lee Ray was taking over the office. The transition was not friendly. Munro had some serious cases on his desk and he begged to meet with Glen Rose, his successor as the gov-



Munro “really likes to support people who he thinks are underrepresented, the invisible population,” says Norm Davis, who ran the state’s Division of Developmental Disabilities. Terry keeps this photo of Ralph and Karen Munro on his wall. *Sullivan collection*

ernor’s adviser on education. Rose said Dixy had told her staff not to meet with any of their predecessors. Munro kept pleading. He and Rose eventually met secretly in a Federal Way bar. “Crazy,” Munro says. “I handed over the files.”

Munro was married with a baby on the way. He and his wife Karen moved to Bainbridge Island. He went back into the food business for a year or so. But the ferry commute and long hours were too much. So Munro quit. He went to see John Hauberg, an heir to a timber fortune and a philanthropist who had been a Bainbridge summer neighbor. Hauberg was the father of two children with development disabilities and was involved in the Foundation for the Handicapped (now Lifetime Advocacy Plus).

Munro came with two proposals. He would write a booklet for judges and their clerks about the state’s new guardianship law. Then he would travel the state explaining to court officials how the law worked and how it would help children like Terry get out of institutions. Munro’s second proposal was to write a \$25 million bond issue for facilities around the state, such as sheltered workshops and group homes, to serve people with disabilities.

Hauberg agreed to pay Munro to carry out the work. He got the booklet printed and met with judges around the state. Guardians are crucial to people like Terry, says Bill Dussault, one of the Education for All attorneys, who went on to write state guardianship laws. Courts wouldn’t consider someone like Terry competent to give “informed consent” to access to their own medical records, Dussault says. Without a guardian, they certainly wouldn’t have legal authority to move themselves out of state institutions. “Guardianships made a big difference in getting people out of state institutions,” says Davis, the former Fircrest superintendent. Along with scores of people with disabilities, Munro then pushed the \$25 million bond measure, leading a 1979 statewide campaign for the referendum he co-wrote with Dussault. He visited newspaper editors across the state, often working in tandem with a disabled person or a representative from an advocacy group. Pitched as “jobs and homes for the handicapped,” Referendum 37 passed with 67 percent of the vote.

Munro had made more friends around the state. He was thinking about running for the state Senate, but realized he probably had more supporters around the state than in his own Kitsap County. He began campaigning for secretary of state. It was a post

that a mentor, Lud Kramer, had used as a broad platform to take on social justice issues and urban unrest. Munro's opponent was Clark County Auditor Ron Dotzauer, an energetic Democrat and Vietnam War combat medic who became the youngest county elected official in the state in 1974. People with disabilities worked hard for Munro. "We had evenings where we would have disabled and wheelchair folks at 15 to 20 key downtown Seattle intersections from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m.," Munro says. "They would sit there and hold up my signs on sticks. Same for the Husky and Seahawks games." He won with 51.3 percent of the vote.

AS THE STATE'S top elections official, Munro ushered in a number of changes to make voter registration easier and encourage turnout, such as the state's "motor voter" law allowing citizens to register when they apply for or renew a driver's license. "I had a lot of ideas for changing election laws in Washington, all of which Ralph has accomplished," joked Dotzauer, his vanquished election opponent.

Munro didn't stop caring about people with disabilities. He remained Terry's legal guardian until several years ago. He continued to be part of a relatively small group of people that shaped the focus and direction of the disability rights movement in Washington, says Dussault, whose career spanning five decades has centered on disability rights.

As for his top accomplishment, Munro points to community meetings he attended over the years – and the quiet people who'd sit in the back of those gatherings.

"The meetings might have been about a new voting system, or putting ramps for handicapped people into voting places. They'd just sit there and wait until the meeting was over. And this happened time after time. And they'd walk up and say, 'Mr. Munro you don't remember us but when our boy got raped in the Monroe reformatory you got him transferred to solitary. And we just want to thank you.' Well, all the time I worked for Evans I had all those individual cases. It wasn't hard work... But those people never forgot. They weren't Republicans or Democrats, they weren't anything. But they never forgot. And that's what I'm most proud of. It sounds kind of self-serving to say it, but it's true."

TERRY NOW LIVES in a nice house on a cul de sac in Marysville, with two other men with disabilities and a 24-hour caretaker. He has his own bedroom, adorned with framed photos of he and Munro. Terry looks young for 59, at a trim 135 pounds, with a neat goatee. He worked for 30 years sorting recyclables. Now he polishes parts at a workshop for Boeing. He also attends classes and activities. He spends holidays and goes camping with his foster



As the state's top elections official, Munro made polling places more accessible and printed the first Braille voter's pamphlet.  
*Washington State Archives*

family who think of Terry as just family, says his foster sister Kellie Derum. “That’s right, Kellie,” Terry says, recalling a family camping trip.

“He feels empowered and enriched because he has a job, and pays taxes, and lives in a home,” says Derum, who became Terry’s guardian after Munro relinquished the duties because of Terry’s distance from Olympia.

Community-living options for people with disabilities are so much better than they were in 1968, Munro says. “Much better, Ralph, much better,” Terry says.

Munro started as a volunteer. He remained one in retirement: ringing a bell for the Salvation Army before Christmas, helping at his neighborhood elementary school, going to East Africa year after year, helping to eradicate polio by administering vaccine drops one child at a time.

“I see people today trying to find fulfillment in all these screwy places,” Munro said on the eve of his retirement. “If people would just go down to their local school and walk in and talk to the first-grade teacher and offer to volunteer, they’d find a hell of a lot more fulfillment than they’d find in the spa at Palm Springs.”



Munro remained Terry’s legal guardian until several years ago when his foster sister Kellie Derum (left) took over the duties. Terry, 59, now lives in a nice house on a suburban cul de sac with two other men and a caretaker. *Bob Young photo*

**Bob Young**  
**Legacy Washington**  
**Office of the Secretary of State**





Community-living options for people with disabilities are so much better than they were in 1968, says Munro. "Much better, Ralph," Terry says. *Bob Young photo*



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***1968: The Year That Rocked Washington*** looks back at 1968 and its impact on Washington state through the stories of some remarkable people who lived through it. On college campuses, the campaign trail and evergreen peaks, Washingtonians were spurred to action. It was the year when Vietnam, civil rights, women's liberation and conservation coalesced—the year when tragedy led the 6 o'clock news with numbing regularity. 1968 changed us in ways still rippling through our society a half century later. *1968: The Year That Rocked Washington* features a collection of online stories and an exhibit at the Washington State Capitol in the fall of 2018. Legacy Washington documents the activism and aftershocks of a landmark year in world history. [www.sos.wa.gov/legacy/sixty-eight/](http://www.sos.wa.gov/legacy/sixty-eight/)